

The Appellate Strategist

INSIGHTS ON APPELLATE ISSUES, TRIAL CONSULTATIONS, AND EVALUATING APPEALS

[Chief Justice Ronald M. George's Early Judicial Career \(Part Two of Four\)](#)

December 28, 2010 by [Kirk Jenkins](#)

Yesterday, in the [first post](#) of this series, we considered Chief Justice George's career prior to his elevation to the bench. Today, we continue with the Chief's service on the trial bench and the California Court of Appeal.

The Chief Justice was appointed to the Los Angeles Municipal Court on April 20, 1972 by Governor Ronald Reagan. He was thirty-two years old. "I sort of felt and looked like the boy judge," he told a newspaper reporter in 1996. He served as Supervising Judge of the West Los Angeles Branch of the Court in 1974-75, where he instituted several reforms, including a master court operation and seeing that forms were provided in Spanish translation. He was elected to a six-year term on the court without opposition in 1976.

Chief Justice George was elevated to the Los Angeles Superior Court on December 23, 1977, this time by a Democratic Governor – Jerry Brown. He was elected to six-year terms, again without opposition, in 1978 and 1984.

In 1981, then-Judge George was assigned to preside in the case of the Hillside Strangler, *People v. Angelo Buono*. The case nearly went off the rails in the pretrial stages when Kenneth Bianchi, an accused accomplice who had entered into a plea bargain agreement requiring him to testify, gave an unbelievable performance on the stand, ultimately testifying that he did not know whether he was telling the truth in saying Angelo was involved in the murders.

Concluding that Bianchi would never withstand cross-examination, the District Attorney's office responded by moving to dismiss all ten counts of murder against Buono. In a courageous ruling, Judge George denied the motion to dismiss, concluding that there was sufficient evidence to corroborate Bianchi's testimony and convict Buono. Not long after, the District Attorney withdrew from the prosecution, which was then undertaken by Attorney General George Deukmejian.

The trial was arduous -- jury selection consumed over three months, and the prosecution's case involved more than a thousand exhibits and two hundred fifty witnesses. The Government's closing argument took eleven days. But finally, in the fall of 1983, what was at the time the longest criminal trial in U.S. history concluded with verdicts of guilty against Buono on nine of ten murder counts.

Following the Hillside Strangler case, George became Supervising Judge of the Criminal Division. On July 23, 1987, he was appointed to the Second District of the Court of Appeal, this time by Governor George Deukmejian.

Join us tomorrow as we review Chief Justice George's nineteen years of service on California's Supreme Court.